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The Path of Initiation: The Fivefold Pattern of the Witching Way

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From "The Witching Way of the Hollow Hill"

Most people have the understanding that to claim to belong to a traditional witch "group", one must go through a period of learning, join a group, be vouched for, and be initiated. This is how many modern groups do work.

I think this is a very problematic formula, however, because most people fail to see beyond it. They seek out groups or join them for the sake of membership- but groups don't make witches or mystics; Fate makes witches and mystics.

This standard formula of "joining the group" fails to take into account that the true purpose of "Traditional Groups" is not to build membership and share rituals. The purpose of a serious spiritual grouping is to achieve Wisdom and Illumination. No wise, thinking person would ever make the claim that Illumination and Wisdom ONLY come from membership in a special group.

In truth, Illumination and Wisdom come from the Soul of the World itself, from the Unseen worlds, from Spiritual Beings, from other mysterious forces, and from within. What "groups" do, is merely speak a symbolic language, hoping to channel these very things. "Groups" do not and cannot originate these things, nor make them happen in their members with any certainty. Groups may serve some useful purposes, but without members coming to them already aware of the deeper origin of Wisdom, they are doomed to fail as groups, for the same reason exoteric churches all gradually fail.

There is a period of learning involved in becoming a Traditional Witch or Mystery Initiate. There are vouches, initiations. But they do not come only from groups. To understand how we all partake of these things, we have to understand the deeper pattern.

The Period of learning can occur totally between a person and the Land itself; the group you join are the Pale People, or Hidden People, the dwellers in the Underworld; you are vouched for by your own devotion to the Unseen and by your own heart's weight, and the heart of authentic initiation occurs totally within the Underworld, which is simultaneously inside the individual.

Some organizations try to take control of this process, act as "guardians" of it, teachers of it, but I believe that this is haphazard at best; it leads often to a certain abuse of power and a harmful egocentrism that does more harm than good. No group is supposed to be about its members, titles, leaders, or their activities, but about the Greater Fate of Illumination. All members of a true grouping of the Old Rite will seek to cast away identity and worldly titles and powers to the great Darkness of Wisdom below, and all are

submerged in the singular desire for the dark and light Illumination of the Mysteries, and for kinship with the potencies in the Land.

The true “group” is a group of people who know a certain humbleness, and who seek a common spring of eternity, driven by a common thirst- a thirst for the Other and for Illumination, not thirst for temporal powers and offices that are far less. They protect the Land and the true keys to Wisdom because they have given up all for them, and received all back in return, not because they jealously desire to secret up power in some vault.

They know the disastrous consequences of egocentrism- they know how the ego-centered, power hungry human destroys the Land and abuses power and other people; this is why the path is kept shaded with secrecy, and for no other reason. When those of pure heart, ready to cast away all for the wisdom born of the Underworld and ready to sacrifice for Love of the Land show themselves, they are taken into the group and introduced to its mysteries. There is no other qualification. It is a strange love, a strange desire that the Old Ones use to lure people to the ways of the Hidden Craft. Human witches cannot and should not stand in the way of this, for in so doing, they fail in their true role as guardians.

The "outward" initiations that people in groups perform are supposed to be mere representations of a great and timeless pattern of Transformation, great and timeless realities that no human being or group can claim a monopoly on, as they underlie all works of art, culture, and inspiration.

The Path of Initiation, in Traditional Folklore, as well as (more generally) in the Western Mystery Tradition, has several stages, that manifest in outward events, but are primarily Innerworld realities:

1. The "reaching out" to the powers of the unseen world; the "petition" at the Hollow Hill or the Faery Mound, a stage by which the limitations of the human being are defined through perception and understanding, and the "leap of faith" or the "longing for the beyond" is felt and expressed, from human to what is beyond human; this is the “earth” or Land experience.
2. The 'year and a day' period (or a set period of a fixed time) of internal growth, or the "spiritual hermitage", or the trial-time; also, at times, instruction by Otherworldly beings or their representatives; This is the station of the circling airs, that communicate knowledge.
3. The descent into the Cavern of the Black Water and the Two Torches, or the Initiatory Chamber below, (The chamber or cavern of Enody or Zerinthia) to the source, or to the presence of the Initiatrix in the Innerworld/Underworld, the Pale Woman under the Hill,

Queen in the Meadows of Elfhame, who brings about (a normally traumatic) ego death in the candidate, and bestows the Innerworld birth, purification, and regeneration, (which at this stage is largely unconscious in immediate depth and effect, but which is necessary to further transformations, and which grows on its own into new, long term understandings).

This represents the first "intrusion" or "appearance" of the outside forces that were called to the initiate in stage one. Their very appearance turns all things "upside down", and destroys and transforms all things. Nothing can ever be the same again after this initial contact with trans-personal forces. This is the Underworld Initiation in which old patterns of thinking and living are destroyed and newer, better patterns are regenerated and the personality of the initiate is altered forever, and made better, wiser, capable of experiencing life in a new way. This is the descent into the dark waters below.

4. The meeting of the Devil or the Otherworldly Guardian and the Trial, followed by the bestowal of a first stage Transformation. This stage is the fetch-awakening, at the threshold of the soul, wherein the Puckril, the Familiar or 'Fetch Beast', is identified or bestowed. This is the merging of the human nature and the animal nature; this is also a further "arrival" of outside forces that were called by the soul of the initiate. This is the kindling of the Cunning Fire.

5. The meeting with the Fetch Mate, or Otherworldly Lover- the Congress of the Incubi/Succubi, the Faery Marriage between the mortal and the immortal, this world and the next, soul and spirit, or the "Wedding Chamber" sacrament of the Gnostics; This is the final culmination of the divine chain of events set into motion by the call of the initiate, the merging and union of the balanced human nature (a balance achieved by the merging with the Puckril) and the divine nature. This is the "invisible mystery" or the spirit-essence of all.

It is strange but true that even though the initiate "travels" or journeys to the locations where these forces interact with him or her, their original call set into motion a chain of events that led seemingly inescapably to those beings or forces- and thus, what looks like personal quest is anything but- it is not even a summoning; it is actually those forces coming TO the initiate.

Only the ego of the outsider or the half-wise views it as effort on the part of the initiate to "reach" them- in reality, when the initiate travels to reality, reality is traveling to the initiate.

The Great Forces answer. The purpose of the "time of learning" is to show the initiate how to be aware of their answer- this is why trance techniques and other consciousness-alteration methods are taught at this time. After that point, everything that happens to the initiate is in reality an answer from the Otherworld, and this is what the initiate comes to understand, eventually.

After these five stages are achieved, The Witch or Initiate's "Fate" is transformed; altered into a new path of internal growth that causes a unknowable route into a new condition, beyond this life (and beyond the death of the candidate).

The route of this new condition is the Third Road to Elfland, the destination is Mastery, the Faery/Fetch Metamorphosis or the Deathless Transformation into the ranks of the Hidden Company, or the Grand Array.

During the remains of an initiate's life, the affects of these five experiences, and the further attendant transformations, cause Wisdom to blossom in the soul of the candidate (as the soul is now united with the Spirit) and it causes the special modes of perception and understanding to open in the candidate (gradually) that are the source of many mythical seership abilities and the like.

"Magical" abilities (and I hate to use that term) are also sometimes gained, though this is a far more poetic idea than the term "magic" expresses. Knowledge and real Wisdom, direct experience of the Unseen world, and the ability to "reach into" the self, or the depths, to directly experience and mediate extra-sensory reality, causes what seem to be like "powers" or abilities to understand and influence some events in life.

But this is only a tiny matter of a greater growth.

The five-fold initiatory pattern leads to internal transformation, a "road change" from the straight road of the common person, moving slowly through Fated time, onto the Crooked Path, or the Third Hidden Road, which is the attainment of a "Second Destiny" of types. It's very subtle, and does not happen overnight.

This pattern is embedded in the workings of the cosmos itself; we can see it in ourselves and in Nature- the acorn, pulled by the draw of Fate and Nature away from the origin tree falls into the underworld, where after a time, and when outer forces reach it- (light, and water from above) it sprouts and grows into a new being- the fertilization in the seed occurring within, but spurred on by outside forces.

In reality, even the "outside" forces are part of a whole reality, of which the seed may ignorantly think of itself as "apart" from- but the truth is found in Holism. Did the acorn go the ground, or did the ground go to the acorn? Both occurred. There is only one reality, one system, one chain of Fate. Did the sunlight and water reach the acorn, or did it reach them? Both occurred. Do not let false divisions impede your ability to see the truth of Holism.

One might wisely then ask- "did the whole chain begin when an initiate decided to make the original petition to the forces beyond him or herself, or did that decision and petition come from another place make the initiate?

When you can answer that question, then you will see how Fate calls all things to initiation and transformation, eventually, and without exception.

This entire pattern can be realized through working groups that have the means and understanding to REALLY bring about these five transformations, but at heart, all of these transformations (and whatever symbols people use to represent them in the outer world) are not physical, blunt realities; they are internal, otherworldly mysteries that emerge through all things.

They come from the Unseen. A group is very unique and special indeed if it can really bring about these transformations in a systematic, direct way- most groups cannot, because 99% of people have not gone past the first one or two "steps" on the initiatory path. Most people who call themselves occultists have not even gone past the first.

Luckily, a person can walk this entire path alone. In fact, even before you realize it, you are on this path, whether you belong to a group or to no group.

Groups that tell you otherwise are just trying to get your obedience or money, or both. I'm not saying that a good group of humble, like-minded people, poets and mystics, shouldn't be worked with if you find them; but good luck finding them. The wise would do well to look to themselves, within and beyond, for the emergence of this pattern. The simple act of looking shows that it is occurring.